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Ag 84 Pro  
PA-708

Superseded  
H/G Bul. 58

TO USE #708

# DA GRADES

## *in Buying Food*

DAIRY  
PRODUCTS

POULTRY

EGGS

MEAT

FRUITS AND  
VEGETABLES



# HOW TO USE USDA GRADES IN BUYING FOOD



It's hard to judge the quality of many foods you buy in the grocery store. But USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) grades for food can help you.

The grades are measures of quality. If a food has been graded by a Government grader, it may carry the official grade mark, shaped like a shield. This folder shows the official shield-shaped grade marks used on different foods and tells what they mean.

You won't find the USDA grade mark on all foods. No law requires it. It is used on foods only when the packer or processor wants to use it and can meet the requirements for using it.

The foods you are most likely to find carrying the USDA grade shield are beef, lamb, chicken, turkey, butter, and eggs. When one of these foods is marked with the USDA grade, this means that it has been examined by an expert Government grader and he has certified that it measures up to a definite standard of quality.

The grade marks are put only on foods that are clean and wholesome. The food packer or processor who wants to have the Government grader certify his products—and wants his products to carry the USDA grade shield—must meet strict requirements for cleanliness in his plant.

Foods that do not carry the USDA grade mark are good, too. But if you learn to recognize the grade mark and know what it means, it can help you to know more about what you are buying, to compare prices of foods in different stores, and to get the most for your money.

The grading and inspection services described in this folder are conducted by *USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service*. In some cases they are conducted in cooperation with State departments of agriculture.

Issued June 1966  
Supersedes Home & Garden Bulletin No. 58,  
"Shoppers Guide to U. S. Grades for Food"

☆ GPO : 1966 O-216-697

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government  
Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402 - Price 10 cents

# DAIRY PRODUCTS

This is the USDA grade mark used on butter. It is printed on the carton and on the wrappers of quarter-pound sticks of butter.



Butter that carries the U. S. Grade AA mark is the best quality. It has a delicate, sweet flavor.

The next grade, U. S. Grade A, is almost as good and usually sells for a lower price. There is also a third grade, U. S. Grade B. This does not have quite as good a flavor and sells for less than the higher grades.

These same grade marks may be used on *Cheddar cheese*, but only a few stores have graded cheese.

This "Quality Approved" mark may be used on *cottage cheese*, *process cheese*, and *sour cream*. It means that the product is of good quality and was manufactured in a clean plant, under the supervision of a USDA grader. At present, only a few plants are using this "Quality Approved" mark on their products.



## POULTRY



GRADE A TURKEY



GRADE B TURKEY

This is the grade mark used on *poultry*. You are likely to find it on the wrapper, or on a wing tag, on *chickens*, *ducks*, and *turkeys*.

There are two lower grades, Grade B and Grade C, but you will practically never see these grades printed on the poultry label.

Grade A birds have more meat and a better appearance than those of the lower grades. You can see the difference in the pictures shown here.

The grade of the poultry is not a guide to how tender the bird will be. That depends upon its age. Young turkeys, broiler and fryer chickens, and ducklings are more tender than older birds.

If the label carries the word Young—for instance Young Turkey (or Young Tom or Young Hen)—or words like Broiler or Fryer—then you will know that these are young, tender birds. If it says Tom Turkey or Hen Turkey, Stewing Hen, or Duck (rather than Young Duck or Duckling), then you will know that these are older birds which will have to be boiled or stewed in order to be tender.





This is the grade mark used on *canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables*. It is also used on a few related products like honey, jam, and jelly.



There are three grades: U. S. Grade A (Fancy); U. S. Grade B (Choice or Extra Standard); and U. S. Grade C (Standard).

Not many of these products carry the U. S. grade mark on their labels. The ones you are most likely to see are frozen vegetables, frozen orange juice, jam, and jelly.

However, if the label has one of the grade names on it, without the U. S. in front of the name, then it must measure up to that quality even though it has not been officially graded. An example would be a label with the word "Fancy" or "Grade A" on it.

Most canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables are packed according to the grade standards, whether or not it is indicated on the label, and priced according to their quality.

Most are at least Grade B quality—and this is quite good. Grade A, of course, is



excellent—use it for desserts or salads where looks and texture are important. Grade B fruits and vegetables are not required to be as uniform in size and color as Grade A products, nor quite as tender or free from blemishes.

Grade C products are fairly good quality, just as wholesome and nutritious as the higher grades—and they sell for less.

This grade mark may be used on *fresh fruits and vegetables*. When you see it, it means good quality produce. And it means that the product was packed under the supervision of an official Government grader.



Although most fresh fruits and vegetables are sold at wholesale on the basis of U. S. grades, not many are marked with the grade when they are sold in the grocery store.

The typical range of grades for fresh fruits and vegetables is U. S. Fancy, U. S. No. 1, and U. S. No. 2. For some products, there are grades above and below that range. For instance, grades for apples are U. S. Extra Fancy, U. S. Fancy, U. S. No. 1, and U. S. Utility.

The grades are based on the product's color, size, shape, maturity, and number of defects. The lower grades are just as nutritious as the higher grades. The difference is mainly in appearance, waste, and preference.

## FRUITS AND VEGETABLES



## GRADE

This is the grade mark used on *eggs*. It is printed on the carton or on a tape used to seal the carton. It shows both the grade (the one shown here is U. S. Grade A) and the size of the eggs. (The size shown in this grade mark is "Large.") Sometimes the size is not printed in the grade mark but is printed separately on the carton.

There are three grades for eggs. The top grade is U. S. Grade AA. The next is U. S. Grade A. U. S. Grade B is the lowest grade.

Some stores sell all three grades and there may be quite a difference in price between the grades.

The top two grades (AA and A) are best for frying and poaching because they don't spread out very much in the pan and the yolk is firm and not easily broken.

Grade B eggs are just as good to eat. But the white is thinner and the yolk may be flatter than in eggs of the higher grades.

In most States, eggs marked with a grade and size—like "Grade A, Large" "Grade B, Small" (without the "U.S." in front of the name)—are required to meet the U.S. standards for that quality and size even though they have not been officially graded.

## SIZE

Eggs come in different sizes, and the size has nothing to do with the quality. So you have two decisions to make in buying eggs—the grade and the size.

A dozen “Small” eggs must weigh at least 18 ounces. “Mediums” must weigh at least 21 ounces, and “Large” eggs at least 24 ounces. As you can see, there is a 3-ounce difference between each size.

Smaller eggs sell for less than the bigger ones, of course, because you really buy them by weight just as you do meat and other foods.

As an example, let’s say Large Grade A eggs are selling for 60 cents a dozen. To be of equal value, a dozen Medium Grade A eggs would sell for about 7 cents less, or 53 cents. Small Grade A eggs would sell for 7 cents less than the Mediums, or 46 cents. If the smaller sizes were priced much below this—if the price difference were more than 7 cents—then you could get more for your money by buying the smaller sizes.

Watch for bargains in these smaller sized eggs, particularly in late summer and fall when they’re usually plentiful. If you make it a habit to check the usual price difference between sizes, then you’ll be able to spot the bargains when they’re available.

Bear in mind that the normal price difference between sizes may be more or less than 7 cents, depending on the general price level.



**EXTRA LARGE**  
**27 OZ.**  
**PER DOZ.**



**LARGE**  
**24 OZ.**  
**PER DOZ.**

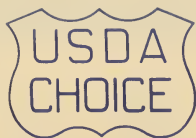


**MEDIUM**  
**21 OZ.**  
**PER DOZ.**



**SMALL**  
**18 OZ.**  
**PER DOZ.**

A mark like this may be stamped on *meat*. This is the grade (Choice) you are most likely to see.



Several kinds of meat are graded—beef, lamb, veal, and calf—and this shield is used on them all.

Main grades are Prime, Choice, and Good. There are lower grades, but you are not likely to see them marked on the meat. Some stores may have beef marked with the Standard or Commercial grades.

## BEEF

Two things are important in buying and cooking beef—the quality grade and the cut. Some cuts, like rib roasts and most steaks (sirloin, porterhouse, T-bone, club, and rib steaks) are fairly tender in any grade you will find in retail stores and can be roasted in the oven or broiled. Other cuts, like round steaks and chuck roasts, are naturally less tender and usually should be pot-roasted, braised, or pan-fried.

The beef grades are a guide to *how* tender most cuts will be—and to how juicy and flavorful the meat will be.

*Prime* beef is the best and most expensive. Not many stores sell it. Most Prime cuts will be very tender, juicy, and flavorful.



*Choice* beef is high quality. Steaks and roasts of this grade will be quite tender and juicy and have a good flavor.



*Good* grade beef is not as juicy and flavorful as Prime or Choice, but it is fairly tender and not wasty because it doesn't have much fat.



*Standard* grade beef has very little fat and a mild flavor. It lacks juiciness but is fairly tender because it comes from young animals.



*Commercial* grade beef comes from older cattle and is not very tender. It needs long, slow cooking with moist heat (pot-roasting or braising). If cooked properly, it will have a good, rich flavor.



## LAMB

Most cuts of Prime or Choice lamb are tender and can be roasted in the oven or broiled. Lower grade lamb is seldom seen in grocery stores.

Lamb is produced from animals less than a year old. Meat from older sheep is called yearling mutton or mutton, and if it is graded these words will be stamped on the meat along with the grade mark. Chops and legs of yearling mutton are fairly tender if they are graded Prime or Choice. Mutton is not as tender and must be braised or pot-roasted.

## VEAL AND CALF

Prime and Choice grade veal is juicier and more flavorful than lower grade veal. Most veal is not tender enough to be broiled, but the higher grades can be roasted. Lower grades should be cooked with moist heat to insure juiciness and good flavor.

Most of the comments on beef grades apply to the grades of calf, but you cannot expect calf meat to be as flavorful or as juicy as mature beef.

# INSPECTION for your protection

Besides grading foods for quality, USDA also inspects some of them for wholesomeness. The marks shown here are used on foods that have passed USDA inspection.

Don't confuse these marks with the grade marks shown on the other pages of this folder. All meat and poultry sold across State lines must be Federally inspected and carry the round inspection mark. But grading is not required.

Look for the *inspection* mark for assurance of *wholesomeness*. Look for the *grade* mark to tell the *quality*.

This is the inspection mark used on fresh and cured meat. You are more likely to see it on large cuts, like roasts and hams, than on smaller ones. It assures you that the meat was produced from healthy animals in a plant that is clean and operated in a sanitary manner under constant supervision of a USDA inspector.



This mark is used on processed meat products—canned, frozen, dried, or packaged. It means that the product is clean and wholesome. It also means that the label has been approved by USDA—that it is truthful and accurate.



This is the inspection mark used on poultry and poultry products, whether they are fresh, frozen, canned, or dried. It means the same thing as the meat inspection marks—that the product is clean and wholesome, fit to eat, and that you can depend on the label to tell you what you need to know about the product.



This mark may be used on fruit and vegetable products and a few others like jam and jelly. It is not required by law. But it, too, is assurance of a good clean product, produced under the supervision of a Government inspector. Labels bearing this mark must be approved by USDA as being truthful and accurate.

